

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1771
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1040

JERUSALEM FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINS SY US
SUBJECT: VARIATIONS ON ASAD'S DESIRE FOR PEACE SETTLEMENT

1. MFA AMERICAN AFFAIRS DIRECTOR SHOEFI HAS PROVIDED US
WITH HIS INTERPRETATION OF ASAD'S CURRENT DESIRE FOR PEACE.
IN SHOEFI'S VIEW, IT HAS BEEN ALMOST THREE YEARS (MAY 1974)
SINCE ASAD OBTAINED SOME TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS.
HE BELIEVES ASAD WILL EXHIBIT FLEXIBILITY IN ANY
NEGOTIATIONS ON GOLAN HEIGHTS, PERMITTING DEMILITARIZATION,
UN TROOP PRESENCE, AND EVEN POSSIBLY ALLOWING CONTINUED
EXISTENCE OF SOME ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS "IF ISRAELIS PRESS
THE ISSUE," AS LONG AS HE CAN OBTAIN NOMINAL RETURN OF
SYRIAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE HEIGHTS. SHOEFI CLAIMED
GOLAN HAS BECOME SYMBOLIC ISSUE, SIMILAR TO KUNEITRA
IN 1974. ASAD THEN CARED LITTLE ABOUT ACTUAL MILITARY
ARRANGEMENTS AROUND CITY--INDEED AGREEMENT HE SIGNED LEFT
ISRAELIS IN MILITARILY DOMINANT POSITION AROUND KUNEITRA--
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AND SHOEFI BELIEVES ASAD READY TO COMPROMISE ON
SUBSTANTIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR GOLAN IF HE ASSURED HE WILL
OBTAIN SYMBOLIC VICTORY TO EXPLOIT DOMESTICALLY.

2. SHOEFI REITERATED
ASAD'S DESIRE FOR SETTLEMENT,
AND STATED HE DID NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY THAT ASAD

WOULD TRY TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH ISRAELIS THROUGH KING HUSSEIN OR DIRECTLY IF US PROVED UNRESPONSIVE (NOTE: SHOUI COMMENTED THAT, IN HIS VIEW, ASAD COMMUNICATED WITH ISRAELIS THROUGH HUSSEIN PRIOR TO SYRIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON).

3. TURNING CONVERSATION TO INTERNAL POLITICS, SHOUI SAID ASAD'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES WERE "UN-SYNCHRONIZED," WHEREAS SADAT HAD COMPLEMENTED HIS TURN TO THE WEST WITH FAR-RANGING MEASURES TO LIBERALIZE EGYPTIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM. ADMITTING SADAT CONFRONTED SERIOUS STRAINS, SHOUI NONETHELESS ASSERTED THAT ONE OF SADAT'S STRENGTHS WAS WILLINGNESS TO TOLERATE OPEN CRITICISM. HE ALSO WARNED THAT WHAT HAPPENED IN EGYPT USUALLY AFFECTED SYRIA, ALTHOUGH PERHAPS WITH TIME LAG OF SIX-TWELVE MONTHS DURATION.

4. SHOUI SAID THAT ONE INTERNAL BENEFIT ASAD DERIVED FROM SETTLEMENT PROCESS WAS DIMINISHED LOCAL IMPORT OF IRAQI THREAT. "MOST SYRIANS WANT TO SETTLE CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL. THEY KNOW IRAQ OPPOSED SETTLEMENT, AND THUS DO NOT TAKE SERIOUSLY IRAQ'S ANTI-ASAD APPEALS."

5. SHOUI ASSERTED THAT RUMORS MAKING ROUNDS OF THE COUNTRY GAVE INDICATION OF POPULAR SENTIMENTS. AS EXAMPLE, HE CITED STORY THAT HAD ORIGINATED IN HOMS, CREDITING US WITH WARNING ASAD THAT MINORITY ALAWITE REGIME WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE AT GENEVA. NOTEWORTHY CONFIDENTIAL

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POINT, IN HIS VIEW, WAS NOT PATENT FALSEHOOD OF RUMOR'S CONTENT, BUT POPULAR PERCEPTION THAT ASAD WOULD ONLY MODIFY HIS REGIME UNDER OUTSIDE PRESSURE, AND THAT SETTLEMENT PROCESS PROVIDED FRAMEWORK FOR THIS PRESSURE.

6. COMMENT: WHILE SHOUI NOT PRIVY TO ASAD'S THINKING ON ME PEACE STRATEGY, HIS SUGGESTION THAT ASAD MORE INTERESTED IN SYMBOLIC FORM AND PRINCIPLE THAN IN DETAILS OF GOLAN ARRANGEMENTS MAY CARRY SOME SIGNIFICANCE IF PARTIES RE-ENGAGE. ON FOREIGN/INTERNAL POLICY LINKAGE, HE OBVIOUSLY HOPES ASAD WILL EMULATE SADAT'S PATTERN, WHEREAS ASAD MIGHT EQUALLY WELL DECIDE THAT RENEWED EMPHASIS ON BAATHI SOCIALISM COUPLED WITH TIGHTENING OF INTERNAL SECURITY WOULD PROVIDE MOST EFFECTIVE SYNCHRONY TO EXPANDED DIPLOMATIC CONTACT WITH WEST. MURPHY

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